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1st Place Contest Entry: Countering the Current: The Function of Cinematic Waves in Communist vs. Capitalist Societies

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Writing my University Honors Capstone research paper “Countering the Current: The Function of Cinematic Waves in Communist vs. Capitalist Systems” would not have been possible without the indispensable resources at the Leatherby Libraries, the Chapman University Digital Commons, and assistance of the library staff. I began with an interest in how the Czech New Wave and New Hollywood cinema are defined by their agency in preserving and prescribing cultural meaning across their societies, while being bound to their economic systems. I stopped by the circulations desk and spoke to Rand about how best to use the online search function for articles, books, and databases. He taught me to start out with a broad search of terms and pick out keywords from the descriptions of relevant results to narrow my search, using the Leatherby Library database and JSTOR. Although I remember hearing about the term TRAAP from my FFC literary information session, I was reminded by Rand to stay vigilant of the sources that I choose base my research off of, using the principles of timeliness, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose.

By refining and limiting my terms to “Czech New Wave”, “New Hollywood”, “Capitalist film system”, “Communist film system,” I was able to find a multitude of physical copies of books which the library had that was relevant to my investigation. From these, I picked out Peter Hames’ *The Czechoslovak New Wave* and Robert Kolker’s *A Cinema of Loneliness* as the foundational texts for learning about the waves. I was aware of Peter Hame’s credibility, as I learned about him at the Czech National Film Archive while I was studying abroad in Prague in 2017. Although he is from Britain, he is in fact the leading scholar of Czechoslovak cinema, with a multitude of books written on the subject. I also checked out James Tweedie’s *The Age of New Waves*, a book on the cinematic movements that influenced and were influenced by these waves, that proved to be a relevant source in broadening my understanding of what constitutes a wave. From this, I discovered that adopting a sociological, philosophical, and psychoanalytic interdisciplinary framework to view the films of these waves through was necessary in understanding their impact on their respective societies.

The library’s reference desk suggested that I look through the bibliography of these works to find what primary texts they had used to build their interdisciplinary arguments about the movements. Here I was able to verify the accuracy of my sources as most referenced the same group of theorists including Adorno, Horkheimer, Baudrillard, Badiou, Foucault, Brecht, Bakhtin, Sartre, and of course, Marx. I unearthed that the key concept between these philosophers was how the proliferation of image impacts the identity of the individual in postmodern society. This influenced my further searches to involve concepts of modernist and postmodernist cinema, wherein I found Keith Booker’s book *Postmodern Hollywood* and Derek Nystrom’s journal publication “Hard Hats and Movie Brats: Auteurism and the Class Politics of the New Hollywood”. With every newfound resource, a plethora of relevant concepts revealed themselves, from auteurist theory to Wilfred Bion’s “binocular vision,” a subject my professor Kelli Fuery had a 2019 book written on available at the library.

While writing my paper, I found that some results on Leatherby's database that I had been interested in using were not accessible online or in person. I met with a different librarian at the circulation desk who showed me how to request an interlibrary loan. Here, they also showed me that Chapman offered different databases that could help narrow my search such as the AFI Catalog, Encyclopedia of Aesthetics, New York Times Historical, and the wonderful film streaming service Kanopy. Among the other film archive databases through the library's site, they also suggested that I check with the Dodge Film Media library to see if they had any of the obscure Czech films I needed, or if they could order it especially for my project. I was then connected with Pavel Jech who was able to give me a rare copy of an important Milos Forman film I needed called *Černý Petr*.

Using this film and Leatherby's copy of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* as my primary sources, I found that most secondary sources written about them around the time that they were made served the purpose of critical review rather than analyzing them through their function in a wave. I discovered through the date publication date limiting function in Leatherby's database that it wasn't until the 1980s that scholarly sources began referring to the film movements as "waves" which played an important role in the political system which they were made under. This retrospection allowed for the writer to analyze the films through a broader framework, incorporating the postmodern framework which was popularized around the time of the late 1980s and 90s.

Setting out to write this paper, I was intimidated by the task of having to cite forty pages in the Chicago Manual of Style as I was only previously familiar with MLA and APA styles. While working in the library, I was attempting to cite my first film source and could not find online how to properly format my citation, so again I went to the circulation desk. After teaching me how to cite the films, they referred me to the Chicago-Style quick guide online and that I use the notes bibliography format as it is the system most applicable to humanities research. I discovered that I actually prefer and enjoy using footnotes as I had grown accustomed to looking through the cited sources in the footnotes of my resources.

For my future research, I plan to use the Chicago style when applicable. I found that I have a passion for writing about film through the interdisciplinary framework, bridging concepts from my film major and honors minor. Many of my original ideas arose from Kelli Fuery's European Cinema Class and Bernard McGrane's Social Movements of the 60s class. Both these professors, the library staff, and resources provided by Chapman were indelible to the formulation of this paper and I am currently seeking outlets to publish and share my work. In my conclusion, I extrapolated how the emergence of a cinematic wave in the United States could aid the next major socioeconomic shift in our political system. In all of my research, I did not come across any scholarly sources that proposed this argument, which I feel could become relevant for the progression of cinema in our postmodern world. I hope that my time and effort put into amalgamating these ideas with Chapman's aid can prove useful someday to scholars in

not just film, but economics, politics, sociology, and philosophy.

“That factor in a work of art which enables it to transcend reality certainly cannot be detached from style;

but does it not consist of the harmony actually realized, of any doubtful unity of form and content, with and without,

of individual and society; it is to be found in those features in which discrepancy appears: in the necessary failure of

the passionate striving for identity,” Adorno & Horkheimer, *Enlightenment as Mass Deception*

The consumption of art is historically oppressive as the makers and receivers of meaning

depend on an economical and political hierarchy. At the end of the nineteenth century, with rapid

industrializing society, modernist thinkers played a fundamental role in shaping culture with the

rejection of transactional art. Critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer predicted

the future success of isolated artists, but overwhelming failure of society to continue in the

modernist trajectory of psychopolitical progress. Written in 1944, *Enlightenment as Mass*

Deception identifies the inherent peril of mass production of cultural content within Capitalist

societies. Their pessimistic account of the interwar rise of the American film studio system ¹

with comparison to Fascist regimes around Europe is relevant in examining how

the film

medium has evolved through late Capitalism. Postmodern audiences are experiencing an

exponential bombardment of images, necessitating the filtering of information. Passive,

transactional media imposed into culture by Capitalism conditions audiences to seek profitable,

what Marx calls, “illusory happiness”. Even with the resurgence of independent cinema, ²

confrontational content which stimulates mass critical analysis an individual's agency within

society is only effective in the form of a Wave. Cinematic Waves serve society in disseminating ³

¹ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford Univ. Press, 2002), 94–136. ² Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 71–72. ³ Status of proper noun for purpose of paper.

the methodology of political change and preserving it within their history. Examining notable

Waves in their successes and failures reveals the conditions necessary for one to occur, and why

their impossibility in American Cinema (Hollywood) propagates transactional

filmmaking.

A case study of the Czechoslovak New Wave and New Hollywood compares the

functioning of cinematic movements under Communist and Capitalist societies. The period of

the 1960s/70s in which these movements take place is emblematic of the shift from modernist to

postmodernist structuring of society, which will be analyzed through the framework of Frederic

Jameson, Alain Badiou, and Jean Baudrillard. Jameson distinguishes the artistic creativity in

modernism as “the belief that artists should strive to develop unique individual styles that are the

direct expressions of their own inner selves” while for postmodern creatives there is an “intense

psychic pressure of life under late Capitalism [that] shatters the psyche itself, destabilizing the

once solid core of individual identity and rendering it ineffective as a source of aesthetic

expression”. Filmmakers possess agency within social systems to break tradition and define the ⁴

present, and as Rimbaud says “one must be absolutely modern”. Badiou points to the notion of ⁵

the avantgarde as a tool for filmmakers to define modernity.

Avantgarde art is inextricably linked to politics as it negotiates “difficult double

relation

between the present and (present) past and that of the coexistence of different truth procedures".⁶

Badiou puts "present" in front of the the word "past" as a reminder that all of history was once a

present. One must consider how the past present informs the present and present future during

⁴ M. Keith Booker, *Postmodern Hollywood: What's New in Film and Why It Makes Us Feel So Strange* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007). ⁵ Arthur Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell and Other Poems* (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2006). ⁶ Jan Voelker, "Reversing and Affirming the Avantgardes: A New Paradigm for Politics" in *Badiou and the Political Condition*, by Marios Constantinou Constantinou, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 14763.

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ideological revolutions. Literary theorist Terry Eagleton defines ideology as the "nexus between

discourse and power," and Kolker expands that it "constructs the very image of the individual

and his or her potency or impotence in the world". Badiou's 'truth procedures' can be thought of⁷

as the idealist (present) past ideology, such as Marxism, and the present manifestation of its

socioeconomic functioning in reality, such as Communism. The avantgarde is a heteroglossic

(multitude of voices), holding at once the (present) past ideals and the present reality of system's

function. This will be exemplified in the Czech New Wave' blending of realism (present past ⁸

ideal) and absurdism (present reality) to subvert Communist tradition. The antithesis of the

avantgarde would be the popular form, the mainstream, born out of "commodification of

aesthetic production". The cultural industry which Adorno and Horkheimer believe conditions ⁹

the masses into passivity is evidenced in the art which socioeconomic systems reward. For

pre1960s Communism this would be social realist tradition and for early Capitalism this would

be Classical Hollywood narratives, what A&H would deem "monoglossic". Aesthetic ¹⁰

innovation and experimentation is necessary in countering monoglossia. In his 1970 seminal

essay which considers the role of an artist within society, Michael Kustow frames the creation of

art as a revolt;

"A revolt first against culture, against its custom of naming and placing and

judging. A revolt against esthetic norms; against existing artistic languages. A

revolt in the name of fresh perception, in the name of a tradition ignored by the

⁷ Robert Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg, Altman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). ⁸ Mihail Mihajlovič Bahtin, *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, and Voloshinov* (Arnold, 2003). ⁹ Voelker, "Reversing and Affirming the Avantgardes: A New Paradigm for Politics," 14763. ¹⁰ Bahtin, *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, and Voloshinov* .

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